

*T. Townsend
Shrewsbury*
"CHRIST BEFORE PILATE"

BY

MICHAEL MUNKACSY.

NOW BEING EXHIBITED

AT

The Conduit Street Galleries,

9, CONDUIT STREET, REGENT STREET, W.

UNDER THE DIRECTION OF

MESSRS. THOS. AGNEW AND SONS.

APRIL, 1882.

“And when he was accused of the Chief Priests and Elders, he answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto Him, ‘Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee?’ And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the Governor marvelled greatly.”—ST. MATTHEW, xxvii. 12.

“And Pilate answered and said again unto them, ‘What will ye then that I shall do unto him whom ye call the King of the Jews?’ And they cried out again, ‘Crucify him.’ Then Pilate said unto them, ‘Why, what evil hath he done?’ And they cried out the more exceedingly, ‘Crucify him.’”—ST. MARK, xv. 12.

“Pilate therefore said unto him, ‘Art thou a king then?’ Jesus answered, ‘Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.’”—ST. JOHN, xviii. 37.

“CHRIST BEFORE PILATE.”

THE last picture by M. Munkacsy, “Christ before Pilate,” is an event in contemporary art, and will mark an almost unexpected development in the artist’s talent.

Hitherto subjects of such importance and on so large a scale had not been attempted by M. Munkacsy.

This new work seems to reveal to us an unknown Munkacsy, who has raised himself, by one stroke of his powerful wings, from the charming though more modest regions of Elegy and popular Drama to the most sublime heights of Epic Art; and there, in a subject which has been a thousand times handled, he has shown his originality without endeavouring to do so, an effort which has often led artists only to eccentricity. The secret of this originality may be found in the fact that the artist has never ceased to be *himself*. He has worked at his subject without preoccupying himself with what others had done before him, and the result is the simple reflection of his poetic, creative mind.

M. Munkacsy, in his change of subject, appears in another light—he has developed a new style of colouring. He belongs to the School of artists who love the effects of chiaro-oscuro, strongly developed light and shade; but his colouring, which was condemned as gloomy, over-laid with brown pigment, and as if spotted with soot, now glows with all the richness of the Venetian palette; from Goya he has passed to Tintoretto. The impression produced by Pilate recalls the emotions we feel when contemplating the grand works at Venice of this impetuous master.

However, it must be owned that in the case of those who have attentively followed the series of works produced by M. Munkacsy

this development will be less unforeseen than would at first sight appear. In his early works we already find the two master qualities we admire in his latest production—*Emotion*, and I will not say the *love of truth*, which we find amongst so many artists in the platonic state, but the *Power of being true*, which implies at the same time a faculty of superior observation and great skill in execution.

In the picture which M. Munkacsy now exhibits, the central point, the dominant idea of the composition, is the figure of Christ. The eye is irresistibly drawn towards it, and yet this portion of the work has been the principal subject of discussion.

As regards all the rest of the picture, I have heard but one general expression of admiration. But the figure of Christ has been freely criticized, and in a spirit alike free from prejudice or party bias.

We meet with free-thinkers, who argue that it falls short of the ideal; fervent Christians, who consider it sublime. My feelings are entirely with the latter class; as to the type of the figure, I believe it to be admirable, but with a very slight reservation, which I will explain further on.

Its very originality is the reason why it does not at once command universal approval; we have here a new conception of the person of Christ; it is unexpected, and admiration is preceded by surprise. True masters do not trouble themselves to consider the ordinary requirements of their public—they work in their own way, and raise the public taste to their level.

I have heard the hackneyed remark repeated around me, “He is not the divine Christ.”

What does that matter? How ought divinity to be expressed in a painting? Is it necessary to place a halo of glory and golden rays over the head of Christ, as was done in the tradition of the Byzantine School, adopted by the artists of the Middle Ages, and by the image-makers of our own time?

The Christ of Munkacsy is assuredly not one of those insipidly beautiful Christs, with hair neatly combed, tall in stature, so dear to the academical school, who believe they honour the divinity by attributing to it the advantages and adornments coveted by human vanity. Neither is he one of those enervated Christs, impregnated with mystic sensuality, produced by artists who speculate on petty devotion.

He is the Christ of the Gospel, who bears on his shoulders the sufferings and the moral debt of humanity; but who bears it with the consciousness of his divine mission; with sadness because of

his love for us, but without hesitation and without weakness, knowing that he is God's messenger.

He is gentle, but strong ; we feel that nothing can disturb him, and that all the efforts of which human strength is capable will shatter in pieces against his inflexible resolution.

If there is a shade of emotion in the look which he directs towards Pilate, we must attribute it to his pity for the soul of the Roman magistrate, who does not yield without a struggle and without regret ; who would be willing to obey the voice of his beseeching conscience, but allows himself to be intimidated by the clamour of popular passion, and by the cowardly promptings of his personal interest.

Jesus hears behind him the senselessly ferocious yells of the ignorant, vulgar herd who devote to death, without knowing him, the Man who comes to save them, who demands for them their most sacred rights. Jesus feels compassion for them, no doubt, but his mind is not influenced thereby. He has already said to himself what he will repeat upon the cross, " Lord, forgive them, for they know not what they do." His attention is concentrated on this Roman official, a good man at heart, but cowardly ; like so many functionaries who would sell their soul to further their ambition. Jesus knows what is passing ; he is unmoved by the blind crowd ; but it is the foreseen issue of the struggle between good and evil, raging in Pilate's breast, that so sorrowfully affects him.

The Christ of Munkacsy is spare ; his hollow, sunken eyes betray suffering. He has already suffered the anguish of Gethsemane, the insults and the evil treatment of the Pharisees. He is pale, as ordained by the Scriptures, "*Livore ejus sanati sumus.*" But his attitude, dignified though free from boastful assumption, his lightning glance, prove that the soul has no concern with the sufferings of the body.

In the front rank, to the left of Pilate, two Jews are seated, magnificently dressed ; one of them follows with interest the events of the drama which unrolls itself before him—he would like to know the result. The other casts a searching glance on the figure of Christ. He endeavours to understand him ; he seems to ask if this accused man, despised, condemned by the populace, merits these outrages and violence ; if he has not come, as he himself says, to reveal the truth and the way. Absorbed in his reflections, he listens with an absent air to the admirable public accuser, to the right of Pilate, who, having supported his impeachment with an ardour that

we can read in his figure, concludes his peroration by pointing to the swaying multitude who are clamouring for the crucifixion of Jesus.

How finely grouped is this multitude ! The various feelings which agitate it are also well represented in the changing, but at the same time, harmonized impressions produced on the mind by all these figures, which, in the diversity of their expressions, all converge towards Jesus, whose calmness stands conspicuously forth in the midst of the tumult !

Some are urged on by fanaticism ; others are impelled by an instinct of cruelty inherent in vulgar natures, an instinct which can only be appeased by insults heaped on fresh victims ; to this class belongs the young Jew, who sneeringly leans forward to contemplate the anguish of Jesus. The greater number act in obedience to a watchword, or through imitation ; these are not the least violent ; look at the blackguard from Jerusalem, who bawls louder than the rest, and probably without knowing why.

There are also the dilettanti of criminal trials, who have come to seek distraction. They are discussing and trying the cause amongst themselves as if it were a literary question. Behind the accuser one of these lookers-on has raised himself up the better to view the scene, which however offers to his palled taste but a mediocre attraction. He foresees the denouement, which, moreover, very little concerns him ; but he wishes to know in what manner the knot of this dramatic plot will be unravelled.

Near Christ, in a place of honour, is seated a rich Jewish banker, with florid countenance, imbued with the sense of his own importance, and the respect inspired by large fortunes. He looks with a disdainful curiosity at this seditious man, audacious enough to contend that all is not for the best in a world in which his millions occupy so respectable a position. On the other side of Christ a fierce soldier, full of life, turns aside with his pike the multitude who throng round Jesus.

Prominent amongst these numerous characters and leaning against a column, is a young woman who holds an infant in her arms. She is charmingly beautiful ; her attitude has a grace worthy of Raphael ; the calm and pure sweetness of her features contrasts with the turbulence of the faces which surround her ; she is a Madonna, who has strayed into the Sanhedrim. I am assured that in the artist's mind she was intended to represent the dawning of Christianity. I willingly accept this interpretation : the Christian idea symbolized by a

young woman ; the mind of woman is better fitted than that of man to appreciate the sublimity of the Christian dogma, whose essence is charity. It is woman who sows in the infant's mind the seed of the divine idea. If the artist has depicted her so calm in the presence of the sufferings of Christ, it is doubtless because she believes in his promises ; she has faith ; and beyond the trials and humiliations of the present, she catches a glimpse of the glory and triumph of the future.

To refresh the spectator after all the emotions of this grand drama, the artist shows him, through a window to the left of the picture, a delicious landscape framed in the luminous Eastern sky, and which one would say was painted by a Venetian.

The most admirable feature of M. Munkacsy's picture, and the one which first strikes the spectator, is its composition : this is the quality which distinguishes great painters ; it is to design and colouring what thought is to style. This quality, always so rare, charms and affects us the more that it is nowadays so generally absent ; under the pretext of copying nature, a mere dead semblance is produced, and this defect is observable even in portraits, in which the life and soul are most commonly deficient. The predominant vice of contemporary art is the absence of conviction and ideas, which renders impossible a true representation of nature, for Nature is herself the representation of ideas of a superior order, with which great masters are alone conversant.

M. Munkacsy does not content himself with painting the body—he translates the soul, the mind, the sentiment which animates the body—he creates a living picture.

M. Munkacsy realizes and is able to reproduce the beautiful, as is proved by the young mother and some of the purely Semitic heads depicted in his picture.

If the majority of his figures belong to vulgar types, and portray the worst instincts of the Hebrew race, which is occasionally so noble, we must remember that he here depicts the populace of Jerusalem, lawyers and office clerks, who, from an æsthetic point of view, do not represent the élite of the population.

Some persons have expressed a preference for a figure with a background of red drapery suspended near the window in the picture which preceded that now on view, in which we find the rough sketch of this great work and studies of the principal heads which form part of it. We may be permitted to hesitate between these two figures, which, nevertheless, belong to the same family ; perhaps that by the

window better agrees with the traditional conception of the head of Christ; the one the artist has selected has, however, the incontestable merit of great power and great originality in a subject which has so often tried the imagination of artists.—**An Unpublished Study by Dr. N. Gueneau de Mussy.**

WE are still under the influence of the powerful impression of what we have seen. We still behold in our mind the majestic erect figure of the Saviour, and the stern fanatical tribunal surrounded by a shouting mob, and faint-hearted scribes. Munkacsy's master-piece has laid a hold on our inner world of thought in placing before us a period of the past of mighty import, and recalling to us that endless question about the *destiny and progress of man*, with all its dark and tormenting doubts.

This latest picture of our ingenious countryman, which surpasses all contemporaneous works of art, is just as masterly in its execution as its idea is profound and interesting. It seizes us as with a hundred mighty arms. It awakens in our mind a profound enthusiasm for the incomparable sufferer, and a feeling of exasperation against a community full of barbarousness, hypocrisy, and miserable fanaticism. It proposes to us lofty questions about the worth of morality, and the struggle of enlightened ideas against pusillanimous custom. It opens the book of human characters, and shows to us in forty different physiognomies, a scale rising from the man scarcely above a brute, to the man with a soul sublime. It inspires us also with real Christian charity, by choosing the greater part of these forty persons, who represent a whole world, from the class of misery and from the morally neglected, and announcing in eloquent language the gospel of pessimism, which is still to-day crying for the Redeemer. Only after the mind and the heart have been in some degree satiated with the unfathomable contents of this painting, can full justice be done to the artistic display of *colours* and *forms*. Then only do we discover that the deep soul of the painting is clothed in a wonderful covering, and that an inimitable skill has produced on the canvas, as by magic, numberless figures, full of imperishable life. Then the eye begins to be dazzled by the contrasting fulness of the most

important figures ; then the gaze clings to the traits and contours of every single and expressive face. Then we notice the grand power of dramatic concentration, by which forty different heads, placed in a vast arch, are all intensely directed towards the centre which gives to that almost too complex fulness the interest of perfect unity.

This admirable dramatic unity has been carried out to such perfection, that the best stage manager would find in the picture an unsurpassable model, if he were to represent the scene of Pilate on the stage. It is the highest aim of a genuine artist to produce unity in variety. Munkacsy has incontestably succeeded in this aim. The civilization of the time when the Christian religion was founded, is admirably reflected in the diverse figures, types, features, garments, as well as in the architectural details. Also the *manner* in which the surrounding people are interested in Christ's fate, is represented with just as many shades as there are figures. Not one person resembles another, and not one expresses his emotion in the same way as another. There is no imitation of a pattern, no monotony ; there is throughout a *realistic individuality*, combined with *ideal harmony*.

One figure—that of Pilate the judge—is meditating, with bent head and fingers set as in argument, on Christ's words, apparently endeavouring to solve the question : "What is truth?" A second figure—that of the accuser—is gesticulating demonstratively with both hands, his head raised and mouth open. He expresses a Pharisee's self-consciousness, a fanatic's resolute prejudice. Interesting is a third figure—that of the scribe—perched high on a stool against the marble wall of the Prætorium, his arms crossed behind his back, his uplifted head expressing, as it were, the curiosity of a public chronicler, and throwing piercing and malicious glances towards the defenceless sufferer. The rich Sadducee sits with provoking defiance on the judge's bench, and with an air of satiety he rests his hands on his fat legs. At the feet of the Governor two judges are sitting ; one of them is looking, with the severity of a scholar of the law, towards the disturber of faith ; the other glances with unsteady looks towards the meditating procurator. The eye of a wild fanatic, who has pushed himself close to the estrade of the President, tries likewise to read the expression of Pilate's face. How fine are the shades of distinction in another group of discussing grey-bearded doctors of the law to the left of the tribunal. They are carefully weighing the words of Christ : "I have come to bear witness unto

the truth." This group, consisting of about three heads, is a characteristic tableau in itself, speaking volumes.

We have by no means exhausted the great variety of delicate shades in the figures grouped around the centre of interest. In the midst of that narrow-souled fanatical crowd a *young mother*, with a lovely child on her arms, offers a pleasing contrast. This is the only female figure in the picture, and the only one expressing lively compassion with the accused. This sympathetic look from a woman's eye is a fine conception of the spirit of the Christian religion, in which woman represents the ideal of charity, and which gave back to her the dignity of freedom and placed innocent childhood under the protection of man. We might call this detail of the woman a masterly bit, in the painting, if Munkacsy needed such an inferior praise.

Let us continue the series of inexhaustible gradations which mark the interest displayed by the crowd. At the entrance of the Prætorium we see the most striking figures. The Roman legionary soldier, posted behind Christ, has to use all his energy in order to make a barrier with his lance to keep back the mob. There is a rogue who, with mouth wide open and arms extended to heaven, cries his "Crucifige!" A fanatical shop-keeper has pressed near to the column at the entrance, and with outstretched arms and menacing forefinger seems almost to touch the head of Christ. A street boy on the left has pressed quite near the sufferer, and, leaning forward, is grinning with an inimitable grace right in the face of the most sublime of men. Behind Christ stand the sophisticated usurers, demonstrating to each other the untimely zeal of the founder of the religion. Fanatical believers climb on to the columns. There are also one or two indifferent persons, who complete the whole scale of interest which the historical event excited at the time.

When we imagine we have already seen a sufficient number of figures, and have impressed on our mind the most prominent physiognomies, then we behold all at once quite a number of new heads, peeping, as it were, from the deep obscurity of the corridor, making the impression of a numerous crowd eager to rush in.

The pen is not called upon to reproduce in succession all the details which in the painting are found side by side. It is impossible to describe the impression made by the painting as a whole after the eye has examined the numerous details of "Christ before Pilate."

Neither shall we expatiate on the masterly colouring by which the dazzling white is contrasted so strikingly with the blue and red-brown, and by which the blue sky smiles symbolically, through the opened gates of the court, on Christ, who himself seems to be oppressed by the gloomy atmosphere. Nor shall we recount the thousand triumphs of simply mechanical skill, which make this, even from a merely technical standpoint, a painting unequalled in modern times. In this regard Munkacsy has been compared with Rembrandt, with Raphael—in one word, with the greatest painters of all times. We shall leave it to another pen to treat of these subtle mysteries of art.

What has induced us to take pen in hand, after having accounted to ourselves in some measure for the mighty effect of this painting, is the ideal boldness of its moral conception as it is particularly expressed in the chief figure.

A noble human form, tall and erect, the body and limbs almost concealed by a plain, flowing, white garment, the head, with long waving curls falling down upon the shoulders, the neck, the breast, the bound hands, and part of one foot, this is all we see of Christ. But what depth and fulness even in this little! How noble the face, with its high and finely-delineated forehead! And what an inimitably gentle and yet inflexibly reproachful look in the eye! The whole Christ is in this eye—Munkacsy's whole Christ. It is not the eye of an enthusiast superhumanly enlarged and bathed in heavenly bliss. No, it is a real human eye, belonging to a man, in which the utmost mildness of humanity is blended with the greatest severity of justice.

We think we may safely assert that most of those who look at the picture, are, as it were, spell-bound by that eye. And yet it is not even directed towards us, but it is compassionate, and at the same time the majestic look rests upon Pilate, the representative of earthly justice, the inflexible procurator of the Roman Empire.

How we long to penetrate into the innermost depth of this eye. But this being impossible, let us read the profound mysteries of the other features of the face. A deeply meditating, decisive character is indicated by that line, which runs from the eye to the point of the chin; and we are awed by an expression of indomitable energy, produced by untold suffering. We see the small, firmly compressed mouth, the fine nose, swelled with indignation. These features win us to the cause of the Messiah, who fights the great battle of humanity and leads to eternal triumph. The nobility of the eye, the features

full of soul and energy, captivate us irresistibly. We are animated by a feeling of entire confidence in the leader, whose cause must be victorious, in spite of the cries of the mob. Since the form is entirely human, our confidence is still increased. We have before us the most beautiful type of man imaginable, a noble, vigorous, soul-permeated form, akin to the classical ideal of the Apollo of the Belvedere Gallery, but different, in that his Christ expresses at the same time the whole modern world of thought and moral struggle.

Munkacsy's Christ proclaims the whole ideal of humanity, the power to suffer and to act, at the same time mildness united with justice. Munkacsy's Christ is the symbol of humanity fighting against all the Pilates of despotism, against hypocritical and fanatical Pharisees, against the "Crucify him" of the populace benighted in ignorance.

It is a modern Christ without a halo, without artificial exaltation, without a celestial background. Out of Munkacsy's Christ speaks the *majesty of humanity in its struggle for moral progress*.

Upon this ideal height the confessors of all religions meet, yea, even the opponents of religion. Munkacsy has succeeded in finding in the Catholic High Church as unconditional admirers as among the leaders of modern rationalism, who are delighted to recognise in this picture a Christ in the modern sense, the Christ of Strauss and Renan. Is this not a new, perhaps unforeseen triumph of our countryman's art, who caused the name of his people to shine suddenly among the brightest of modern civilisation?

The form of Christ is still floating before my mind, after standing before it a long time, plunged in deep thought. I still behold its white robe reaching down to the ground, and allowing only a part of one foot to be seen, as if the artist wanted to convince us that this unique historical person *stands upon solid earth*. I see the noble face adorned with bright waving locks and beard, and supported by a slender neck. I see the energetic muscles of that neck protruding and swelling the half-bared arched breast of the *Valiant of the Lord*. The hands are bound with ropes, an almost supernatural calm pervading the form, and contrasting strangely with the noisy fanatical turmoil all around. I see the ropes, loosened as if by invisible hands, and Christ still remaining immovable, whilst the bystanders gesticulate with arms and hands. The calm reveals a new world in the midst of the decay of the tyrannical and voluptuous Roman Empire. It is the calm of the good man, certain of victory, the incarnate optimism of history, which will certainly break all chains, and

establish the kingdom of liberty and light, of love and justice in the midst of despotism, pharisaism, misery, and darkness. — **The "Pester Lloyd,"** *February 19th, 1882.*

MUNKACSY'S latest painting had been expected in Vienna with unusual anxiety, and in fact there were reasons enough for such anxiety. Munkacsy is a remarkable and interesting artist, and each of his new creations an event of great importance in the field of modern art. In the last of his previous works, "Milton and his Daughters," he had executed such a majestic conception, so far surpassing his preceding productions, excellent as they were, that our curiosity was natural and fully justified when asking, how he could maintain in his new artistic creation, the position he had acquired by the preceding one, which had caused such universal surprise and admiration. To all this must be added the sceptical expectation as to how he had handled a religious subject, which, according to all appearance and calculation, was so strange to him; and finally the astounding newspaper reports from Paris, the news of the fabulous price paid for the picture, in short everything fit to excite public curiosity, even if we take into account the fact that these sensational reports may, to some extent, have had their source in the calculating interest of dealers in works of art.

Well, the painting is now here. We have seen the wonder with our own bodily eyes, and we do not hesitate to exclaim: "Yes, it is a wonder, a marvellous work of modern art, which hardly has its equal!"

Whatever may have been said of the painting in order to extol it, there has not been too much said. Without any reservation or restraint whatever, we subscribe to everything that has been written to the glory of the painting and of its creator.

Meissonier, the greatest among the living French artists, is said to have remarked that, since Rembrandt's "Ronde de Nuit," no other painting of such importance has been produced as that of the Hungarian joiner-journeyman who has left his workshop.

We do not know whether Meissonier has really said this; but,

if we consult our own sensations when standing before the painting, we are of the opinion that he might have spoken so, and that such a sentence at least is very plausible. One thing at least is certain, that the beholder of the painting is immediately carried away from the present by the power of genius, not only on account of the lively exhibition of the scene which makes us rather *live with* the historical fact, than simply see it in the picture, but also by the critical study of the work of art, to which we are instigated.

We have no scale of proportion by which to compare this painting with any other work of art. Another colossal biblical painting of Pilate was exhibited lately in Vienna. But what frightful dissonance is produced by the mere attempt to compare these two paintings in our mind. Before Munkacsy's painting we immediately discard all modern art, because we should be greatly perplexed if we had to name a companion worthy of it.

The painting is not an expression of any particular school, neither of the Dusseldorf nor of the Munich, nor of the French school. It is simply and absolutely real, grave, and grand art, detached from all accessories and peculiarities of any group of artists on either side of the Rhine. Munkacsy stands alone with his "Christ before Pilate," on a solitary, lofty height, in the solitude of kings.

We feel ourselves removed from the present because, when standing before the picture, we immediately and involuntarily are dreaming of the great old masters. It is with these that we associate the master of this painting; with them we compare him, without thinking, however, of any particular one of them.

Simplicity is a sure mark of the real classic. In Munkacsy's picture the arrangement is simple and natural, as if it could not be otherwise. Pilate sits in an open hall on an elevated seat. Next to him the Pharisees and Scribes have posted themselves. At a convenient distance from him stands Christ with fettered hands, raising freely his noble, pale face, and listening to the accusation which a Pharisee is just pronouncing against him. The fanatical crowd press about the bright form of the Saviour, and are kept back by the Roman warrior with his horizontally extended spear. Pilate hears the accusation, and ruminates over it in his thought; he seems to be assisted in his cogitation by his demonstrating half-lifted hand. One can almost see through his forehead, how the thoughts are labouring there. There is not one figure in the painting whose character and impressions at that excited moment are not written in its brows. Here is the Pharisee, sitting there in his broad, monu-

mental insolence, and betraying a malicious and obstinate stupidity, that can never be rooted up. There is the woman reflecting eternal love and charity, with her child on her arm, looking compassionately through the crowd on the persecuted and tormented Saviour. Here is the raging proletarian, and there the indifferent, or at most, curious, looker-on; here the doubting thinker, and there the representative of obdurate narrow-mindedness.

Munkacsy has painted no halo around Christ, he has added nothing to the scene, that might not have actually existed, trait for trait. He has not attempted to paint a supernatural being, a divinity; Christ appears before the Court as a suffering, tormented man, who resists every torture by the power of mind and of convictions. Thus Munkacsy has painted him as a suffering man, and a noble mind. It was to be expected that he would not copy the current type. But still it is not so far removed from the type sanctioned by tradition as to make his conception appear strange, and in consequence painful.

Munkacsy has already gained with his "Milton" the highest honours that modern criticism could confer; and now the question might arise, in what relation this new painting stands to the last one, and whether—as there are certain limits drawn for human skill—his "Christ" really marks an immense progress, when compared with that splendid painting, being, according to all appearance, placed so much higher. The answer is very simple: "Milton," indeed, is a wonderful, a perfect work, beyond which progress is hardly imaginable. Above all, criticism would be embarrassed if it had to say in which direction progress might be made. The subject in the painting has been completely exhausted, and the problem fully solved; the same is the case with "Christ before Pilate," and the greater and mightier the task was in the latter painting, the grander the result has proved.

Munkacsy is still young; he has still a long road before him. We do not and cannot know, with what works he may still enrich the world, but after his latest work we do not hesitate to declare that, if an adverse fate should snatch him to-day from our midst, one of the greatest artists of all times would be lost in him. Perhaps such a word sounds more enthusiastic than careful, prudent criticism should utter, for with such imprudently strong expression it may lose its credit or render itself suspicious. Let the word be ascribed to the mighty first impression, but altogether we do not make any apology for it; for, although it has been uttered out of

first deep and glad enthusiasm, it is, nevertheless, the expression of an honest conviction.—The “*Neue Illustrierte Zeitung*.”

No matter in what mood or in what light we turn to the latest great work of Michael Munkacsy, the first and genuine impression always rests, although doubts may have arisen in our mind.

This impression is that we have here a picture of uncommon merit, and that a great artist has produced it. There it is before us, in its overwhelming force, testifying a will, a skill, that silences all our doubts, and paralyses our criticisms. We are immediately captivated by the simple representation of the action, by the charm of sober colours, by the skilful application of the effects of light.

Even should we lose ourselves for a moment among the vast riches of detail in this mass of figures and heads, we should soon find again the impression of harmony which is expressed by the whole. Only when the picture is removed from our sight, do we regain our full liberty ; only then we can pursue the course of ideas which have been roused by the sight of the painting ; then only the judgment is freed from the charm of contemplation.

It is always well to ask ourselves in the presence of a work of art, what were the real intentions of the artist ? What did Munkacsy intend with his painting ? He does not guide us into church ; edification, in the church sense of the word, was not his intention. He has painted no halo ; he has rather put the halo *in* the head of the principal figure, as it were, and has illuminated that head from within.

With Munkacsy we are entirely upon worldly ground ; and what he painted is an historical event, or at least conceived as such. It is, therefore, no religious painting, awakening thoughts of the marvellous ; but an historical scene, where we are impressed by the rule of historical powers. Thus, we have not before us “Christ, the Lord’s Anointed,” the Son of God, who said of himself, “Before Abraham was, I am ;” but Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter’s son. Once Munkacsy was asked what conception he had of the hero of his painting. “I take him as a good, intelligent man,” he answered,

with the frankness of a Magyar to the backbone. This worldly conception has induced him to give to his painting a complete semblance of reality. A faithful representation of Jewish character aided him greatly in his undertaking. There could be no lack of models ; for the Jews continue to live as a memory of their past. They are to-day as real as when they made bricks in Egypt, or hung their harps upon the willows of Babylon. With true artistic delight, Munkacsy took up this remarkable antiquity of a nation, and with an artist's love he studiously represented its various types, from the noblest to the basest. He did justice to himself as a painter of character, as well as a mere colourist who rejoices in lively tints. Jewish society is revealed to us as in an open book.

Although we recognize a family likeness in the different features, we are nevertheless struck with the variety of expressions ; the difference of character and of opinion is indicated in the least particles of the persons.

A peculiar agitation reigns around the judgment-seat of Pilate. The assembly would fain have their own opinion corroborated from the mouth of the Roman procurator ; they would force him, morally, were it in their power, to accept their views.

The accuser stands there before Pilate, haughty, proud, with energetically raised arms. Not far from him, a little nearer to the accused, sits a hypocritical self-satisfied person, with extended legs, and his hands upon his thighs. Between these two, a little in the back-ground, a few cunning old Hebrews are sitting, discussing in a lively manner the pros and cons, and counting their views on their fingers' ends. Now and then another crafty head emerges from the dusky scene. A youth, anything but prepossessing, pushes himself with malicious curiosity towards the accused. Behind the latter, an ugly emaciated individual cries, with all his might, and with his arms stretched up high, his "Crucify him," just as he is pushed back by the lance of a Roman soldier.

Jesus, the noblest of Jews—humanly speaking—is the centre of all this commotion of bodies and minds. His countrymen have dragged him before the judgment-seat of the procurator. His hands are tied. There he stands, motionless, in his long white garment, heedless of the tumult around him. Jesus has just finished the words, "To this end was I born, and for this cause I came into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth." Pilate, on the other hand, with downcast eyes and agitated fingers, is just making strong efforts to utter his "What is truth?" He finds no guilt in the man. Can it

be that Pilate has been softened under woman's influence? We read in the first Gospel, "When Pilate sate down in the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have nothing to do with this just man, for I have suffered much this day in a dream because of him." But in an artistic point of view this is of little import, for we cannot look into the innermost of the soul.

As a complete counterpart, Jesus stands before Pilate. Where Pilate doubts, Jesus believes. Easy excitability and fixed tenacity are expressed in the fair head, on which the traces of profound thinking are marked. A slight irony about the mouth seems to say that all the powers of the world could not overcome him.

Such are, in a few outlines, the contents of the picture. In all those details which we have discussed, we have found the artist, but not yet the entire artist. It is not only the means employed that constitute the artist. Above all, Munkacsy is a colourist. He is a colourist even in his first sketch; and light and colour are his media for the expression of his idea. But here we must not think of a variegation of colour; that can be bought at the paint-shop. Munkacsy is not at all variegated, nor loud. Even in his brightest colour, the white, he strikes a low note, which permits him to produce colouristic effects, by rising gradually from that depth, and remaining within the limits of a rather diversified than large scale. Even the white is an effective colour with him. Only see, how by contrasting it with darker shades, or making them penetrate it, he produces the greatest effect on the painting.

Pilate, Jesus, and half of the noisy mob are dressed in white; and still how they seem to be bathed in colours! On the right of the picture, brown has been employed, rising to red, and descending to the limit of black. On both sides of the composition are broad surfaces of bright blue, corresponding with the colour of the sky, and producing a beautiful equilibrium of colour.—*Neue Freie Presse, February 12, 1882.*